

Project Management Tales – DON'T WORRY...



Debbie Gallagher

By Debbie Gallagher

In two previous articles (January and March 1999), I outlined what to include in the project plan, and a general overview of what's involved in execution and completion of the project. To follow up, I thought it might be interesting to tell you some project management tales. Some of these are stories about projects I've been involved in, while others are stories told to me by co-workers in Canada and abroad. All company names have been changed.

Background

The Acme Corporation decided to design and develop new software to manage the shipping and distribution of parts from the originating plants to Acme's manufacturing facilities all over the world. More than three-quarters of the originating plants were owned by suppliers, who also had their own systems. All functions were to be available to Acme staff over the web, and many functions were to be available to suppliers over the web, all with appropriate security.

The project manager prepared detailed project plans, showing delivery of nine modules over 18 months by several developers. The project plans were formally documented, and included appropriate documents and signoffs from users for all development work and all new organizational designs and processes.

The Situation

The development work began. The programming effort went according to schedule, with no more than the expected number of issues to resolve. The first few modules were delivered for conference room pilot, which was followed by implementation. During implementation of the first modules, twelve months after the project began, the European Region Vice-President of Operations was worried that the new systems were not being implemented very well and that the organization changes were not occurring as planned.

Action Taken

The VP discussed his concerns with the project manager, who was very confident about the project's progress. She reminded the VP that all specifications were very thorough and detailed and had been signed off by all of the user departments.

In addition, she pointed out to the VP that the new organizational design and processes were clearly defined from the outset and it was the responsibility of the VP's staff to ensure they were implemented properly.

Again the following month, the VP brought up his concerns, and was reassured by the project manager, who said, "Don't worry, everything is going exactly according to plan".

The VP continued to voice his concerns. The project manager reviewed the plan with the VP in detail, and the VP conceded that each deliverable had been developed according to the specifications, and had been delivered on time. The VP also had to agree that the organizational and implementation issues were the responsibility of his staff to complete and had been clearly defined.

Epilogue

Every one of the nine modules was developed and delivered on schedule and according to the specifications. The user acceptance testing was signed off, since all modules functioned as designed. However, the project was seen as a failure

throughout the company, and many users avoided using the new systems where possible. The VP had to agree with the project manager that everything promised by the development team had been delivered as designed and on time. And yet, since many functions were never implemented properly, and the project did not deliver the expected benefits, it could not be considered a success. The project manager was devastated! How could delivery according to plan lead to an unsuccessful project? She decided to investigate and determine what had gone wrong.

Conclusion

The problem on this project was that the modules developed were very large. There were two significant challenges that arose as a result of the large modules. First, they required a lot of pilot and implementation effort, including a great deal of organizational and process change at one time. Second, because there was a long time frame from start of development to complete implementation of the first module, the project was well under way before the issues in implementation and organizational change began to surface. The project manager planned her next large project differently. She defined the new eighteen-month project as two dozen very small modules. With smaller modules, there was less development, pilot and implementation time needed for each module. She selected a few of the modules to be developed first, then provided time in the plan for some new

tasks, prior to continuing development. The first new task was post-implementation review and impact assessment for the first few modules. The other new task was re-work of the project plan to ensure the work was being delivered in components that were easier to implement, based on the new information from the review. The other error that the project manager later recognized was her reaction to the VP's concerns. The "Don't worry" response really amounted to "I'm not listening". Although the implementation and organization issues were the VPs responsibility, they were valid concerns. If she had investigated those concerns, instead of trying to re-assure the VP that her team was producing as planned, the project manager would have discovered that the large modules were contributing to the VP's problems. Even at the twelve-month mark, it would have been advisable to stop and review the issues and re-work the plan into smaller units for delivery of the remaining functionality. Probably, late product delivery would have been preferable to on-time delivery into an

organization that could not absorb the changes in responsibility and process. The project manager should have checked out the VP's concerns to either prove him wrong, or to solve the problem that he was worried about. Because she didn't listen, she did not find out until after the project was over that the product was not meeting the needs of the company. TUG

Debbie Gallagher received an Honours BA from the Ivey School of Business (previously Western Business School) at the University of Western Ontario, followed by an MBA from York University.

Debbie is a Manager in the Solutions practice at Deloitte & Touche LLP in Toronto, Canada. Her assignments frequently focus on system implementation, data conversion, or interface design in real estate companies. Many large real estate companies use CTI or JD Edwards systems, which run on AS/400. In January and March 1999, Debbie wrote a two-part article on project management methodology for the TUG magazine. After completing the methodology articles, she decided to

illustrate project management in the real world by writing a series of real project stories. Debbie's project management tales are all true stories, which she creates based on interviews of project managers in Canada and other countries. Each tale is used to illustrate how real project issues get solved, and sometimes, how real projects fail.

Previous to her employment with Deloitte & Touche, Debbie was System Resource Administrator at ADC's (previously Saville Systems) AS/400 data centre in Markham, Ontario. Debbie created several tools for ADC's AS/400, most of them related to DASD housekeeping. She published articles on many of these custom tools in the TUG Magazine.

Debbie was introduced to the midrange world in 1983, when she was employed at Cadillac Fairview. As a business analyst for the then-new CTI Real Estate application, Debbie was involved in requirements definition and user acceptance testing on the System/38.

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